Accreditation Themes

ACCREDITATION THEMES, DIALOGUE AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Several themes thread throughout the Accreditation standards. These themes can provide guidance and structure to self-reflective dialogue and evaluation of institutional effectiveness.

Unlike debate, in which most academicians are trained to seek to score points and to persuade, the goal of dialogue is mutual understanding and respect. Dialogue involves suspension of personal views, active listening, seeking to understand, and welcoming of a wide range of viewpoints during a group’s search for effective ways of addressing important issues. Dialogue improves collective thinking and is encourages as a means for an institution to come to a collective understanding of what it means to be learning-focused and on how institutional resources and processes might be structured to support the improvement of student learning.

Adapted from the Guide to Evaluating Institutions, published by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges.

SUMMARY OF ACCREDITATION THEMES

INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENTS—Institutions make a commitment in action to providing high quality education congruent with institutional mission. There is consistency between mission and institutional goals and plans; the mission is more than a statement of intention—it guides institutional action.

EVALUATION, PLANNING, AND IMPROVEMENT—Require ongoing institutional evaluation and improvement to help serve students better. Evaluation focuses on student achievement, student learning, and the effectiveness of processes, policies, and organization. Improvement is achieved through an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, implementation, and re-evaluation. Resources are distributed and adjusted to reflect its goals, priorities, and evaluations.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES—The institution consciously and robustly demonstrates the effectiveness of its efforts to produce and support student learning by developing student learning outcomes at the course, program, and degree level. Those providing student support services develop outcomes and evaluate the quality of their policies, processes, and procedures for providing students access and movement through the institution. Learning outcomes are measured and assessed to determine how well learning is occurring so that changes to improve learning and teaching can be made. Learning outcomes are at the center of the institution’s key processes and allocation of resources.

ORGANIZATION—The institution must have in place the organizational means to identify and make public the learning outcomes, to evaluate the effectiveness of programs in producing those outcomes, and to make improvements. This requirement for adequate staff, resources and organizational structure (communication and decision making structures) must be oriented to produce and support student learning.

DIALOGUE—The institution should have engagement in inclusive, informed, and intentional dialogue about institutional quality and improvement. The dialogue should purposefully guide institutional change. All members of the college community should participate in this reflection and exchange about student achievement, student learning, and the effectiveness of its processes, policies, and organization. Dialogue should be based on reliable information about the college’s program and services and evidence on how well the institution is meeting student needs. Dialogue should be meaningfully interpreted, broadly communicated, and result in ongoing self-reflection and conscious improvement.

INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY—The institution demonstrates concern with honesty, truthfulness, and the manner in which it represents itself to all stakeholders, internal and external. The theme speaks to the integrity of its policies, practices, and procedures and how it treats students, employees, and its publics. The institution concerns itself with clarity, understandability, accessibility, and appropriateness of its publications; faculty provide for open inquiry in their classes and student grades reflect an honest appraisal of student performance against faculty standards. The institution demonstrates regard for issues of equity and diversity.